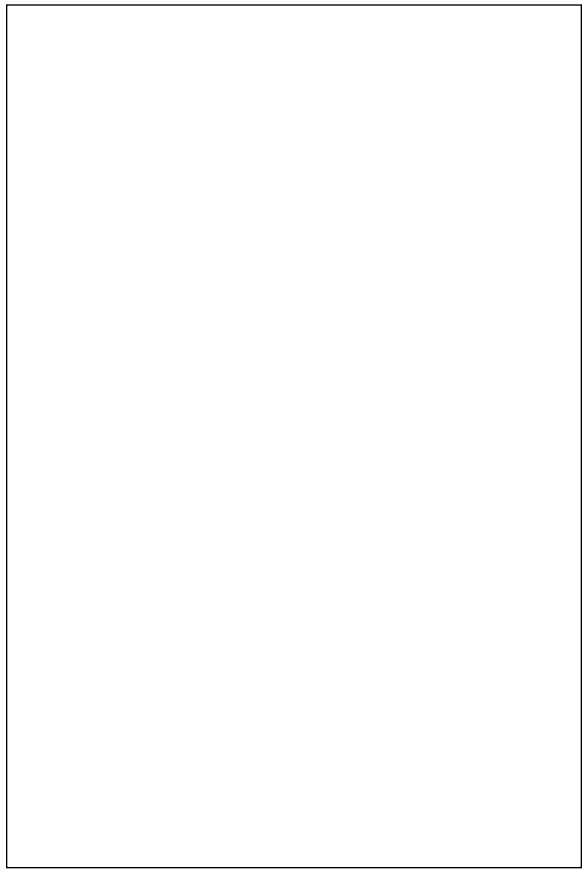
Luncheon Address



The Honorable Eugene M. Zuckert

History as Biography*

The Honorable Eugene M. Zuckert

I happen to believe that history is biography. So, as I began thinking about how I would celebrate the Air Force's fiftieth anniversary, my thoughts turned to three men who I believe laid the foundation for the Air Force as we know it today. In my estimation, our most remarkable early leaders were Hap Arnold, Tooey Spaatz, and Stuart Symington.

The first, Henry "Hap" Arnold, headed the air arm prior to World War II and remained as Chief of the Army Air Forces throughout the war. Hap Arnold was a magnificent leader who steered the growth of the air force from a few hundred airplanes and a few thousand people to an organization of 2.4 million people and more than a hundred thousand airplanes. That combat force, along with its supporting elements, could be projected to all corners of the globe. Hap Arnold graduated from West Point in 1907 and joined the air component of the Army in 1911. He was part of the Air Service through World War I, helped to lead the Air Corps throughout the interwar years, and commanded the Army Air Forces through World War II.

I personally dealt with Arnold on only a few occasions toward the end of his career. Despite the fact that other uniformed officers rose in rank and prominence during the war, nobody had any doubt as to who headed the Army Air Forces. Arnold was an amazing man, with a clear focus and the highest standards, as illustrated by one story that was passed around, even though it may be only apocryphal. The incident recounted was a time that Arnold was flying in his airplane over Nevada, above a B–17 training base. He looked down to see that all the airplanes were on the ground, and nobody was training. So he landed his aircraft at the field, sought out the base commander, fired him, and then took off again.

Obviously, Arnold saw the need for active leadership, but he also had a sense for drama. He was a great institution builder and a great judge of people, and he was not afraid to bring along young people. He was what I would

*RHC wishes to thank Dr. George M. Watson, who has interviewed Secretary Zuckert on several occasions, arranged for him to speak at the Aim High Symposium, and transcribed the former Secretary of the Air Force's remarks for publication.

call a multiplier—able to make things grow. But he had an additional quality that is worth remembering on the celebration of fifty years of the Air Force—he had vision. He knew that for the Air Force to become a separate service, as it inevitably would, it would have to be different; it would have to possess a wholly different philosophy, a wholly different method of operation. Also, it would have to bring in different kinds of people who could move beyond the illustrious combat experience of the war. As a result, Arnold instituted some new projects and organizations that permanently affected the character of the Air Force.

The RAND Corporation was one of Arnold's initiatives. He realized that the Air Force attracted men of action more than reflection. RAND was created to give the Air Force an in-house thinking capability. General Arnold recognized the importance of technology and appreciated the contribution that the scientific community could make to the Air Force. He therefore built upon his friendship with the great European scientist, Theodore von Kármán, to establish what became known as the Scientific Advisory Board that championed the application of advanced technology. The creation of the Arnold Engineering Development Center is further evidence of Hap Arnold's concern about the Air Force's investment in new technologies. Without Arnold's support for the partnership between the military and the scientific communities, the Air Force probably would not have achieved the substantial technological developments that followed.

The second hero that I would like to honor on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the Air Force is Gen. Carl A. Spaatz, the first Chief of Staff of the United States Air Force. He is usually remembered as the Commander of the Eighth Air Force during World War II, the unit responsible for bombing targets all over Europe. General Spaatz, who sported a beautifully groomed moustache, looked like a Prussian general, and was probably descended from one. He had a wonderful face and an understated sense of humor. One of my favorite stories concerns the time that Secretary Symington asked him about a colonel, and Tooey (Spaatz' nickname) looked at him and said, "Well, Col. Babbitt is a very"—and Tooey stuttered a little bit—"a very thoughtful man. He always thinks things over very carefully before he goes off half-cocked."

Spaatz also had a sense of appropriateness that influenced the Air Force's development as a separate service. He was a dedicated believer in civilian control of the military, so he never forgave his good friend, Dwight D. Eisenhower, for running for president. General Spaatz believed that there were problems with civilian control over the military, but that there were more problems without civilian control. The Air Force has always been noted for its pattern of civilian control and civilian partnership with the military, and this precedent stems directly from Tooey Spaatz.

Spaatz also recognized how important it would be for the Air Force to mature. If airmen specialized in anything after World War II, it was inexperi-

ence. I do not think three people returning from the war could have told you where or how the Air Force got its money. I do not think we had three people who had ever testified before Congress. Tooey was determined that airmen learn the skills essential for managing a separate service. The Army and Navy had almost 200 years of experience in submitting budgets and negotiating with Congress. The Air Force, with no experience, was thrown into the middle of a very complicated process. I can assure you that this situation resulted in many humorous though painful episodes.

To help airmen learn more about congressional liaison, Tooey organized a school where he and others observed and listened to lectures about the political process. Tooey often got excited, and when he did, he tended to express himself in a kind of stuttering manner. "One thing that's most important," he stated during one of these classes. "One thing is most important," he repeated, "never, never tell a lie to a congressional committee." He stopped to think about what he had said for a moment and then concluded, "but that doesn't mean it's necessary to blab the truth."

In other instances Tooey showed that he possessed a natural political acumen. He was responsible for the existence of an Air Force National Guard. Some of the Young Turks in the Air Force thought that having states and local politicians involved in Air Force matters was a big mistake. Tooey responded with a simple question, "How many of these states have congressmen?" Thus, he insisted that we have, in addition to the Air Force Reserve, an Air Force National Guard.

Tooey was also a great judge of people. He and Stuart Symington forged a remarkable partnership that got the Air Force off to a running start. I am convinced that, through their abilities and personalities, they established a pattern for cooperative civilian-military relationships that persisted in the Air Force in the years that followed.

No doubt it is not surprising that my third hero is Stuart Symington, the first Secretary of the Air Force. For what he accomplished for the Air Force, I think he deserves to be listed among its heroes. Moreover, my own career owes a great deal to him. If there had not been a Stuart Symington, you never would have heard of me. He picked me from the bottom of the bush leagues, and in two years I went from being a lieutenant junior grade in the Navy to an Assistant Secretary of the United States Air Force.

Stuart was an amazing man, outrageous sometimes, but in ways that endeared him to everybody. For instance, he loved to tell southern congressmen that he had a grandfather who fought on the side of the Confederacy during the Civil War. He told the northern congressmen, which was also true, that he had a grandfather who fought for the Union during the Civil War.

The irreverent among our staff used to call him Golden Boy. He had everything. He was born into a not very affluent, but very distinguished Baltimore family. Everything he touched seemed to turn to gold. He was Yale.

He was good-looking, tall, a wonderful athlete, and his playmates at Yale were from families like the Whitneys. He seemed always to be associated with the best. He even had a fantastic marriage. His lovely wife was the daughter of the revered Senator Wadsworth, later a congressman from New York. It was Senator James Wadsworth who, after being defeated in a reelection to the Senate, returned to Congress as a U.S. representative, and who taught Symington a lot about politics, Washington, and about survival skills in that environment. Wadsworth's daughter, Symington's wife Edie, was talented herself. During the Great Depression, when Symington somewhat fell on hard times, his wife received favorable notice as a singer at the Waldorf Astoria in New York. Everybody loved Edie.

Symington had earned a reputation for salvaging near-bankrupt companies. He went to St. Louis where he exercised those skills with the Emerson Electric Company, becoming a successful industrialist. His affiliation with the Air Force began when his company became the largest manufacturer of B–17 bomb turrets. The Air Corps had asked him to go to England to study the British methods for designing bomber turrets. On his return, Emerson began manufacturing the turrets, and through this venture, Symington made contacts with various military and government offices. So, in 1946 when President Truman appointed him as Assistant Secretary of War for Air, succeeding the highly respected Robert Lovett who held that post during the war, Stuart was already known. He also had the advantage of a friendship with Truman. He was put in charge of the legislation that Truman wanted to push through Congress. He worked to establish the Air Force as a separate service through an organizational scheme that included three services under a Secretary of Defense.

Stuart Symington had an instinct for the jugular, and he was tireless. Those qualities took a toll on his physical condition. He suffered badly from high blood pressure, and we on the staff were frightened about his health because in the late afternoon he often looked so ill we were afraid that something really devastating was about to happen. His executive officer, Brig. Gen. Turner Simms, and I went up to the Capitol one night to speak to his father-in-law. We told Wadsworth that we feared that if Symington, who was so wound-up over the independence issue, ever testified before Congress on the unification bill, something terrible would happen to him. The congressman listened to us, and three or four days later we heard that Symington was going into the hospital. It was not until sometime later that I learned that Wadsworth had gone to Eisenhower, who was then Chief of Staff of the Army. I think it was Eisenhower, whom Symington adored, who persuaded Symington not to testify but to check into a hospital for an operation. That operation, which had not been very successful for others, worked for Symington. I was given the honor of reading Symington's testimony on unification before Congress.

Symington could inspire others, including younger people whom he

hired to work for him. For example, in 1946 or 1947, we had a very young General Counsel in the Army Air Forces Secretariat. Symington hired this man over the strenuous objection of the Army Judge Advocate General. Our General Counsel was probably thirty-five years old. I too was thirty-five and had no experience except a teaching job at the Harvard Business School when Symington asked me to work for him. Symington appreciated the ability and energy young people could offer.

Yet Symington was not easy to work for. Steve Leo, who was Symington's marvelously dry-witted public relations man, told the staff, "I don't understand why Symington is so difficult. Actually he is a very tolerant man—he can tolerate anything except a mistake." Symington could also be impulsive. You never wanted to say to him, "Do you think it would be a good idea to call so-and-so?" because he would grab the phone and call so-and-so. Fortunately, he had tremendous intuition, a quick grasp of situations, and a feel for people.

Symington, like Spaatz, was concerned about the maturity of the Air Force. He knew that being a separate service was a different ball game from being the Army's air arm. He summoned me to his office one time and asked, "Why is it that when I want to do some calculations, I have to send out a search party to find the numbers?" He was determined that the Air Force was going to improve its method of managing resources. He commented that many of those in Congress had the impression of the Air Force as flying boys with white scarves and open cockpits and, "we have to change all that." We took a broad range of steps to correct the Air Force's system of financial management.

Symington also had a gift for understanding social issues. In 1948 President Truman issued the order integrating the Armed Forces. Symington was very proud of the fact that he had overseen the first factory in St. Louis that employed whites and blacks working on the same shop floor. He called in Generals Spaatz and [Ira C.] Eaker and me to tell us that the President had issued an order that the military services were going to be integrated, and that "we follow orders." With the respect that the military had for civilian control, and especially for Symington, the Air Force never had serious problems bringing about the integration of our forces.

* * * * *

In sum, I think that three people—Arnold, Spaatz, and Symington—deeply influenced the way the Air Force was born and the direction it grew. Arnold, as a wartime leader, engineered the Air Force's dramatic success, demonstrating for all time the important role of air power in war. That demonstration brought the independent Air Force into being.

Symington and Spaatz faced a different problem, that of operating a peacetime organization that had to gain respect and credibility and win the support of Congress. They also provided a fine model, by their own example,

of how civilian control should function—military leaders making military decisions and the civilian side focused on the service's obligations to the public and to the Congress. The beautiful melding of viewpoints between Spaatz and Symington gave the Air Force the tremendous advantage of internal harmony.

Those two leaders also agreed on measures needed in order for the Air Force to mature. One was the importance of education, another the concern for efficient management. The Air Force has always had the goal, from Symington's time, of good management. Spaatz and Symington also emphasized a third area, technological development. In this, they followed in Arnold's footsteps. Like Arnold, they were determined that the Air Force should work with the scientific community, so they sought to develop a tone of cooperation that led to the advances we have seen in high-accuracy munitions and supersonic aircraft.

I could go on and on and on describing the ways in which the three men I have talked about brought order, efficiency, and vision to the early Air Force. The military and civilian leaders formed a wonderful partnership that worked remarkably well. I am confident that it continues to thrive today. We can celebrate fifty glorious years.